

NEW YORK TIMES

2 JUNE 1977

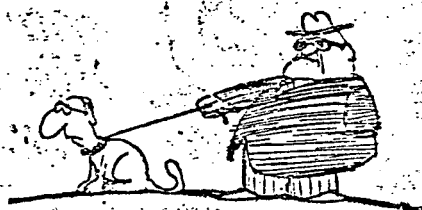
The Watchdog's Bark

By David Wise

WASHINGTON—One year after Senator Frank Church's committee documented widespread abuses and law-breaking by the nation's intelligence agencies, its successor, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, has announced that the Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence agencies are "under the control of the President" and "fully... accountable" to Congress. If so, reform has been remarkably swift.

Nothing could better illustrate the subtle dynamics of changing power roles in Washington. The first intelligence committee, under chairman Church, Democrat of Idaho, was established to investigate wrongdoing by the intelligence agencies. The present committee is a permanent watchdog panel, responsible for overseeing the agencies on a continuing basis. And watchdogs like to convince us that they are watching, that no stray cats have slipped by in the night.

The senatorial assurances that all is well have had their parallel in the executive branch. As a candidate, Jimmy Carter assailed C.I.A. "abuses" and



promised to correct them. As President, when questioned about millions in secret payments to King Hussein, he replied blandly that he had reviewed C.I.A. activities and found nothing "illegal or improper."

The danger of such back-to-normal assurances from both the President and Congress is that the public will be lulled into complacency before any real institutional reforms are effected. The new Director of Central Intelli-

gence, Adm. Stansfield Turner, a smooth, handsome, executive who could easily have been recruited for the part by central casting, has, it is true, pledged to respect the constitutional rights of Americans; but he has emphasized the "adverse impact" of the past disclosures of C.I.A. abuses, and he has also stressed the need to "rebuild" the C.I.A.'s reputation after the "badgering in the press."

Listening to Admiral Turner's testimony to the Senate committee, one would hardly know that he had taken over an agency that had plotted foreign assassinations with mafiosi, opened hundreds of thousands of letters for twenty years in violation of Federal law, and spied on thousands of American citizens in Operation CHAOS. Recently there have been other such disclosures, not the least of which is the C.I.A.'s bugging of officials in Micronesia, for which the United States acts as a trustee, during negotiations over the islands' future political status.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, after rejecting President Carter's first nominee to head the C.I.A., Theodore C. Sorensen, has gone out of its way to cultivate friendly relations with Admiral Turner and the committee's new clients, the "intelligence community." Admiral Turner's two public appearances before the committee were something of a "love-in." He testified that he favored criminal penalties for leakers (although he later softened his position when President Carter proved cool to that idea), and, under Presidential orders, he said he would "not object" to release of a total figure for all United States intelligence spending. With the exception of Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado—who wondered why lump-sum totals for the C.I.A. and other individuals' agencies could not also be made public—the Senators did not question Admiral Turner sharply about anything.

In the area of C.I.A. covert operations, the atmosphere in Washington is, to some extent, one of dirty tricks

as usual. Within the Senate committee, the focus is not on whether such operations should take place but on demonstrating that when covert operations do occur the committee has been informed about them by the White House.

To that end, chairman Daniel K. Inouye, Democrat of Hawaii, carries a beeper, so that he may be instantly notified of the latest James Bond caper undertaken by the C.I.A. And Senator Hart has said that the White House has notified the committee of half a dozen new covert operations. The C.I.A. continues to conduct covert operations around the globe under the direction of the agency's Deputy Director for Operations, William W. Wells.

On the positive side, the mere fact that the Senate committee exists is a great step forward, and may in itself help to prevent some abuses that might otherwise occur. The committee has scrutinized the intelligence budget. It is conducting specific studies on intelligence performance and drafting legislative charters to delineate the authority and limits of the intelligence agencies.

There is much to overhaul and reform. In the process, the committee may discover that a powerful secret agency is not easily made "fully accountable." The Senate Intelligence Committee may yet prove a watchdog with teeth—Senator Inouye was, after all, a tenacious questioner during Watergate—but its real work lies ahead.

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